

Jesus Is Coming: Be Ready

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[0:00] Amen. Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

! In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Now, have any of you ever been swept off your feet by the immense power of water and motion? Anyone?

That's happened to me on more than one occasion. But one fairly recent event sticks in my mind was at Arcana East Clergy Retreat in Cocoa, Florida a couple years ago. And I was having a blast kind of splashing around in the ocean.

You can see where this is going, I'm sure. It was great until I got absolutely toppled by a massive wave, which knocked me off my feet, caused me to do about four somersaults underwater, and then swept me towards shore.

Now, I then slammed pretty forcefully into the legs of one of the people that we were with. And that person immediately looked down and said with utmost seriousness and no hesitation, Oh man, I thought that was a manatee.

[1:21] Now, in that case, the only damage the crashing wave did was injury to my pride, which probably was not a bad thing.

But the ability of water to cause real destruction is pretty incredible. And we see a reference to that in today's gospel lesson, with that reference to Noah and the flood, don't we?

Our text talks about the days of Noah, the flood that came in the days of Noah, and tells us the second coming of Jesus will be like that.

Now, in Advent, as we think about the coming of Christ as an infant, and as we think about Christ coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead, we realize there's a little bit of a tension here. And what do I mean by that? Well, we certainly recognize that Christ's coming means salvation for those who receive him. But doesn't it also mean judgment and condemnation for those who refuse to believe?

[2:30] Now, that is a hard truth, but it is at the core of what Jesus is telling us in our gospel passage for this morning. We're told that we need to be ready.

Because his coming will be at a time when we're not expecting it. We're told that it will be a fearful event for many. Now, before I go on, I think it needs to be said that this passage is kind of a difficult one in another sense.

It's a little bit hard to understand. Again, the larger portion of Matthew that these verses are taken out of seems to be talking about a couple of things at once.

It seems to be talking about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, which came, of course, as a sign of God's judgment for rejecting his Messiah, as well as the coming judgment that will come when Jesus comes again in glory.

Kind of using the destruction of Jerusalem as a bit of foreshadowing of the judgment that's come into the entire world. So, in the larger passage, some of the verses seem to be talking specifically and only about the destruction of Jerusalem.

[3:44] That's not the case in our verses for this morning, which are pretty clearly talking, I think, about the judgment that will accompany the second coming. The other difficulty is that these verses are pretty often misread and misinterpreted in such a way that it actually changes the meaning of the text.

This passage often gets conflated with the idea of being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, as it's presented in 1 Thessalonians 4. Now, if we're reading it that way, then obviously being taken, as our text describes it, is a good thing, and it's a bad thing to be left behind.

But if we read it that way, and I think we'll see this when we look closely at the text, we'll miss the actual meaning. So, let's pay close attention to what's going on in this text, and let's take a closer look, starting in verse 37.

For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Now, that's an attention-grabbing preview of what's to come, isn't it? Now, what do you think of when you think of the days of Noah?

The flood. What was the flood like? Yes, scary, horrifying, right? It was a decisive, dramatic, powerful demonstration of divine judgment against human wickedness.

[5 : 11] That's what we think of when we think of the days of Noah. And wasn't it also a moment of total separation between Noah with his family? Noah, who had found grace in the eyes of the Lord and the wicked.

It was a moment of separation between the two. Jesus is saying that the coming of the Son of Man will be like that. And that's a sobering thought. Now, Jesus then goes into greater detail about what that means in verses 38 and 39.

For as in those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark. And they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away.

So will be the coming of the Son of Man. So the days before the flood, they were doing the kinds of normal, routine things that people always do. They were about the business of usual human life. Eating and drinking, as usual. Marrying, giving in marriage. Family life. To them, it really was business as usual. They were completely unprepared for the destruction that was about to rain down on them as retribution for their sin.

[6 : 29] Then what happened? Well, Noah entered the ark, and God shut him in. The one who had found grace in the eyes of the Lord was preserved from the destruction that came when God judged human sin.

But once Noah was safe, once he was shut into that ark, the flood came. Suddenly. Unexpectedly. Decisively. And their unrepentant were swept away by the powerful waters, and they drowned with no means of escape.

When Jesus comes again, it's a sober reminder that it will be like that.

God's people and his mercy will be preserved in Christ. Those who have refused to obey the call to repent and believe the gospel will perish in their sins.

It will be sudden. It will be decisive. If we're not ready, it will be too late by the time we realize what's happening. It's like we won't even know what hit us.

[7 : 37] Jesus has given us that warning. We'll see it dramatically in the next couple of verses.

Then two men will be in the field, one will be taken, and one left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken, and one left. Now here's where the interpretation starts to get a little bit tricky, where things are pretty often misread and misinterpreted. If we take these verses as a reference to what 1 Thessalonians 4 is talking about, then we'd say it's a good thing to be taken. It would be the case then that the redeemed are taken and everyone else is left behind, as it were.

But on close reading of the text, that's not what we're talking about here in Matthew. Those who are left aren't those who are facing condemnation.

It's those who are taken who are being taken to judgment. Think about the Noah reference for a second. Who was left and who was taken? Those who were taken were those who were swept away by the flood.

[8 : 40] Noah and his family were the only people left. Everyone else was washed away by the waters and they drowned. So basically in this passage, you actually want to be left rather than taken.

Because being taken here is like being swept away by the immense force of the waters of the flood when God judged the world by water in the days of Noah.

Jesus will come suddenly as people are about the business of everyday life just as they were in the days of Noah. And when that happens, those who were not prepared for his coming will be swept away by the crashing tidal wave of the righteous wrath of God.

So we need to be vigilant. We need to be sure that we are ready for that day. And that is the point that Jesus emphasizes next.

Verse 42. Therefore stay awake for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. We need to be ready because the day he's talking about could be any day.

[9:52] We need to make sure not to slumber, to avoid growing complacent, to take our obedience to Christ as Lord seriously, to take our task of spreading the gospel and making disciples seriously because our Lord is coming again in judgment.

It could be any day. Now we get a remarkable image driving that point home in verse 43. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

Now, I have never had my house broken into. Has anyone had that awful experience? Yeah? But, remember one night when I was still living at home as a teenager, we fell asleep with all the windows in the house open.

Now in the early hours of the morning, we woke up gagging and choking at the awful smell fill in the house. Apparently, a skunk had sprayed right outside the open window.

Now, if we had thought of that as a possibility, we probably wouldn't have fallen asleep with the windows open. If I ever thought that a skunk might visit us that night, I would have kept my bedroom window closed.

[11:22] But the point there is that things happen when we don't expect them. A lot of things do in life. And Jesus is drawing an analogy between that and his coming, which will be unexpected.

Then, in our final verse for this morning, Jesus drives home that we must be ready with a reminder of why. therefore, therefore, you also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

So we need to be ready at all times. Because Jesus is coming again, and it will be a time that we don't expect. Now that thought isn't meant to paralyze us with fear.

but it is to remind us that we need to be prepared always. We need to be ready for when he comes again.

Because those who are not ready will be taken away to judgment and condemnation. So our text has given us some pretty important reminders today, hasn't it?

[12:42] First, it has reminded us that Jesus is coming again, but we don't know the hour of his coming. The best clue we have is that it will be an hour we don't expect.

I think the point is that we're not able to accurately tell when that time may be, so it's not that helpful for us to spend a lot of time speculating about it.

What we do know is that it will happen, and we don't know when, so we need to be ready. If it's today, or tomorrow, or sometime this year, or next year. So it could be any of those.

We've also been reminded that as much as Christ's coming will be a cause for joy and celebration for those who are ready for him. It will be a cause for fear and trembling for those who aren't ready. And that should be a sobering thought. Each of us will have to ask the question this morning, am I ready? Now in some ways that question will mean different things to different people depending on where we are.

[13:54] if we don't know Jesus, if our faith isn't in him, then we certainly aren't ready. If our faith isn't in Christ's perfect righteousness, his death on the cross for our sins, his rising again, we can be sure then that we are not ready.

Absolutely not. We can be sure that when the day comes, we will be swept away by the judgment that will fall on us unless we repent and believe the gospel. But even those who profess faith in Christ are presented with the question, am I ready?

As believers, we don't get a free pass from having to ask that question, do we? Now in a lot of our readings for Advent and Lent, we're presented as believers with a bit of attention.

We know that judgment is in fact coming, and we're reminded that we are called to repent, believe, and bear fruit. That that call isn't just to unbelievers, but to believers also.

Now as good Anglicans, we believe in justification by faith alone. We believe that we are counted righteous only through the work of Jesus Christ and not by our own works and deserving.

[15:16] Our own righteousness, even if we were relatively righteous, better than most, couldn't save us. Only the perfect righteousness of Christ can do that, which we receive by faith.

But, we're reminded that justification by faith alone as we understand it is not what is sometimes called easy believism.

Advent reminds us of this as we're reminded to prepare for the coming judgment. One explanation, originally attributed to Martin Luther, but it's been repeated through the ages, goes like this.

We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. In other words, the kind of faith that we're being called to this morning, the kind of faith that saves, changes our lives, doesn't it? Changes our hearts, changes our attitudes, changes our actions, doesn't it change everything about us? If it is faith that is alone, that isn't accompanied by genuine repentance, that isn't accompanied by a desire to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, that isn't accompanied by a changed life, we have to examine ourselves and ask, is what I have the kind of faith that saves?

[16:43] the command to believe should not, cannot, be separated from the call to repent. It cannot be separated from the call to be disciples, to take up our crosses and follow Jesus.

The command to believe on Jesus as Savior, to trust in Him and Him alone for salvation, cannot be separated from the command to strive to obey Him as Lord, can it?

Of course, our obedience will be imperfect, of course, our works can never save us, of course, we'll make mistakes, we'll struggle against sin, and we'll often fail until we take our last breath.

of course, we need to wash our soiled, dirty, sinful robes in the blood of the Lamb. But that washing changes us, doesn't it?

The believer experiences a process of transformation, of sanctification, of growth in holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit that begins in this life and will conclude with our being forever free of sin in heaven.

[18:00] So we have to remember, as believers, lest we be smug or complacent, the Bible never tells us that being disciples, taking up our crosses and following Jesus is optional.

The Bible never tells us that obedience to Jesus as Lord of our lives is optional. And the Bible never tells us that Christian holiness is optional.

Now, in our day and age, the church in the West has forgotten this, haven't we? We've become lukewarm in our discipleship and what has happened. Well, some churches have gone so far as to start treating sin as righteousness and have so given way to false doctrine that they have abandoned the Christian faith altogether.

together. And then, how is the church in the West doing with evangelism? Are we doing really well at that? Not so much. Look at the state of things.

Our culture continues deeper into dysfunction and depravity. How is the church in the West doing at not living as the world lives?

[19:22] Not doing so great at that. is there any cause to wonder why things are such a mess that we haven't seen revival, that we aren't as effective in bearing witness as we're called to be?

I'll put it bluntly, brothers and sisters, the Western church in our day and age needs to repent. To repent of our materialism, fighting our happiness and stuff and money, to repent of our disobedience, to repent of our worldliness, because Jesus is coming again, and we don't know when, but we had better be ready.

And those we know who don't yet know Christ had better be ready. And Advent reminds us of this. So let's encourage one another in preparing our hearts.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.